CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	3 Rivers Communications Twin Bridges Rural Fiber-to-the Home Project
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2018
Proponent:	3 Rivers Communications
Location:	T2S – R6W, Section 23 (Public Land Trust, Navigable Rivers) T3S – R5W, Section16 (Common Schools) T3S – R6W, Section 19, 24, 26, 29, 30, & 31, (Western/Eastern Trust) T3S – R7W, Section 36 (Common Schools Trust)
County:	Madison

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

3 Rivers Communications has applied to the MT DNRC, Dillon Unit to provide Fiber to the Home (FTTH) facilities that will cross 9 tracts of state land in the Dillon Unit. The new (FTTH) facilities would provide telephony, high-speed data, and broadband services to the rural Twin Bridges area. Currently the rural Twin Bridges exchange is serviced by ageing copper cables that have reached their useful life limit, preventing 3 Rivers Telephone Coop from being able to fulfill service requests, including full deployment of DSL services. The proposed facilities will be buried fiber optic cables placed within existing cable corridors along state highway or county road rights-of-way both in public rights-of-way and utilizing some private easements. The upgrade comprises approximately 52 miles of new fiber optic cable in Madison County.

Buried placement of new facilities will be accomplished using plowing, trenching and boring, where appropriate, and for the most part with the use of a vibratory plow drawn by a crawler tractor. The latter process involves insertion of the cable to a depth of 36" to 42" through a temporary surface opening of approximately 6"ins width. This opening is closed and repaired immediately behind the plow following insertion of the cable. All construction will be completed in accordance with RUS procedures and utilizing RUS plans and specifications.

The guide in these matters is the new Montana State Telecommunications Plan as mandated by Rural Utilities Service (RUS), an agency of the Department of Agriculture, and defined in Final Rule 7 CFR Part 1751 entitled, "Telecommunications Systems Planning and Design Criteria and Procedures."

Ground disturbance would be minimal, except for the placing of hand holes at points along the installation route to access the buried cable. Hand holes are a rectangular box approximately 20" tall by 25" wide by 32" long that the traditional phone pedestal sits on. They are buried flush to the ground and provide room under the pedestal to allow access to the fiber-optic cable for splicing or repairs.

The upgrade will allow for clearer communications and make available high-speed internet and digital television service to customers in the area.

The width of the combined easement over the 9 state tracts would be 20 feet wide, 10 feet each side of centerline and the length is approximately 504,995 feet long and would encompass approximately 11.5931 acres of state land. See attached maps.

3 Rivers Communications plans to start construction on this project in May of 2018, and complete the construction of the project by the fall of 2018.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Scoping notices were sent to the following parties seeking comments for the proposed project:

Fish, Wildlife and Parks: Wildlife Biologists, Vanna Boccadori and Dean Waltee

Fish, Wildlife and Parks: Fisheries Biologist, Ron Spoon

All DNRC State Land lessees affected by this proposal were contacted by 3 Rivers Communications to sign settlement of damages forms.

Madison County Commissioners,

DNRC: Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie

Montana Natural Heritage Program

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

The Madison County Weed Board administers the state weed laws in Madison County.

310 Permits from Madison Conservation District may be needed for all perennial stream and Jefferson River crossings and have been applied for. 3 Rivers Communications plans on boring all stream and river crossings under this proposal, meaning that there will be no encroachment within the high-water marks of the streams or rivers.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A: Action Alternative Grant 3 Rivers Communications 9 utility easements over state land sections for the installation of telecommunications cable. These easements would be granted for the specific purpose of installation and maintenance of an underground telecommunication cable and to upgrade current facilities and services.

Alternative B: No Action Alternative – Deny 3 Rivers Communications 9 utility easements over state land sections for the installation of fiber optic cable.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The proposed underground telecommunication cable routes follow existing state, county and private roads where disturbance has occurred in the past and the terrain is favorable. A vibratory plow drawn by a dozer will plow a temporary surface opening of approximately 6 inches in width. The opening would be closed immediately behind the plow to eliminate any berms. The line would be placed a minimum of 42 inches deep in the shoulder of existing roads. Disturbance would be minimal, except for placing hand holes at points along the

road which would be placed within the existing ROW. Soils identified on the tract within the route of the project are of varying soil types. The scope of this project will cause very little disturbance of soils with little chance of erosion occurring from the proposal.

Action Alternative: Minor soil disturbance will occur under this alternative. No long term or cumulative effects to soils are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No disturbance or impacts to soil resources would occur under this alternative.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:
Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

Action Alternative: 3 Rivers Communications has applied for 310 permits for all perennial stream and river crossings associated with this proposal. All crossings will be bored beneath the streams and rivers outside of the high-water marks, thus not needing a 310 permit. Even though 3 Rivers will be outside of the high-water mark of the streams and rivers they have applied to the Madison Conservation District for permits so they can be reviewed by the Conservation District's Board before proceeding with any installations near streams or rivers. 3 Rivers is waiting to hear back from the Conservation District to see if they will issue permits for the crossings.

Under this alternative all communication cables crossing the Jefferson River will be bored beneath the river. Using this method of installation, no change in ambient water quality standards or degradation of water quality will occur. All construction methods will be done in a way to minimize impacts to both ground and surface water sources. No long term or cumulative effects to water quality would be anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to water quality would occur under this alternative.

6. AIR QUALITY:
What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Action Alternative: during the installation phase of this proposal, a small increase in dust particulates in the air will occur. This change in air quality standards would only be short term, and no long term or cumulative effects would be anticipated. The area currently meets EPA ambient air quality standards and is not located in a class I air shed. Any impacts from construction would be temporary and should not result in significant impacts to air quality. No long term or cumulative effects would be anticipated from this alternative.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to air quality will occur under this alternative.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:
What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

Action Alternative: Some minor vegetative disturbance is expected under this alternative. The disturbance would occur during initial telecommunication cable installation activities that require tracked-equipment driving along the proposed route to bury the cable. It is not expected that the disturbed areas will need to be re-seeded with grass seed due to the small amount of disturbance that will occur. Any noxious weed infestations caused by construction on state land will be the responsibility of the proponent to control. All weed plans will be submitted to the Madison County Weed Board for approval. If a large area of surface disturbance to vegetation does occur 3 Rivers Communications will need to re vegetate this area by spreading grass seed on the disturbed area.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to vegetative cover would occur under this alternative.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Action Alternative: A variety of big game, small mammals, raptors, songbirds, and grouse may use these areas. Installation of the underground telecommunication cable would be near other existing buried cables, overhead transmission lines and public road rights-of-way. Due to the relatively small disturbance area and brief installation period, minimal impacts are anticipated due to the underground telecommunication cable installation. Short duration disturbance may occur to any number of these species, however no long-term change in habitat will occur and no long term or cumulative effects to these species are anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats would occur if this alternative is chosen.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:
Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

The Montana Natural Resource Information Service (NRIS) was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located near the project area. The query results are listed below:

Great Blue Heron (Ardea herodias) – The Great Blue Heron is currently listed as sensitive by the State of Montana. According to the MNHP site, the blue heron primarily inhabits riparian areas and wetland habitats. This proposal will take place in the uplands away from riparian areas away from the Big Hole River, and would not impact blue heron or their habitat.

Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) – Bald eagles are a protected species under U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service regulations, it is also a BLM sensitive species and classified in the State of Montana as a species potentially at risk. The proposed project will not alter the existing vegetative community type and would not influence use of the area by bald eagles. The project would not have cumulative effects on bald eagle habitat or species distribution in the area.

Bobolink (Dolichonyx oryzivorus) – Bobolinks are listed as sensitive by the U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management. According to the MNHP website, the bobolink prefers habitat consisting of tall grass areas typical of moist sites. The proposed project is located along existing roadways in short grass vegetation on a dry site. The project will not affect bobolink or their habitat.

Arctic grayling (Thymallus arcticus) – Fluvial arctic grayling is currently listed by the US Fish & Wildlife Service as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Grayling are listed as a high-risk species by the State of Montana and as a sensitive species by the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management. The proposed installation of an underground telecommunications cable is away from the Big Hole River. The proposal would not impact arctic grayling or their habitat.

Gray Wolf, (Canis lupus), Occasional use of the area by gray wolf could potentially occur but is generally considered outside of their normal occupied habitat. All Southwest Montana is listed as grey wolf habitat. The Southwest Montana wolf population has been deemed as an experimental population and has been proposed for delisting from the endangered species act. The proposed project is located around existing

roads and houses near the town of Twin Bridges. This proposed project would not have a cumulative effect on grey wolfs, their habitat, or distribution.

Mountain Plover, (Charadrius montanus), have been identified as using a portion of the site where the underground telecommunication cable will be located. Mountain Plovers are dependent on short grass prairie that has a history of being heavily grazed. The installation of an underground telecommunications cable will not have any long-term impacts or cumulative effects on the bird or it's habitat.

Action Alternative: During the installation of the underground cable some of the species of concern could be disturbed. The project will be of short duration and a limited number of disturbed acers will occur. Under this alternative some short-term impacts may occur but no long-term or cumulative effects are anticipated from this proposal.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats would occur if this alternative is chosen.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Action Alternative: A Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventory was conducted of the area of potential effect on state land. Despite a detailed examination, no cultural or fossil resources were identified in the easement corridor. No additional archaeological or paleontological investigative work is recommended. The proposed project will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to historical or archaeological sites would occur under this alternative.

11. AESTHETICS:
Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Action Alternative: The location of the proposed project is in sparsely populated areas and will not impact aesthetics significantly. The new cable will be buried underground and will not be visible once installed. Due to the relative remoteness of the project area and short duration of the cable installation period, aesthetics should not be adversely affected. No long term or cumulative effects to aesthetics are anticipated from this alternative.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to aesthetics will occur under this alternative.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:
Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

Action Alternative: No demands for additional environmental resources are required for this project. No short term, long term or cumulative effects to Environmental Resources should result from this proposed alternative.

No Action Alternative: No impacts on the demand for environmental resources of land, water, air or energy will occur under this alternative.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:
List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

Action Alternative: SRI River Holdings has applied and been approved for the installation of an underground stock water pipeline in section 19, T3S, R6W. A checklist EA was completed for this project March 27, 2018. No other known environmental documents pertinent were identified during the scoping process. The two projects would have no long term or cumulative effects to the area.

No Action Alternative: No other environmental documents pertinent to the area would be impacted under this alternative.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:
Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Action Alternative: This proposal could cause some safety concerns during the installation phase of the project. Additional traffic on rural roads and heavy equipment could increase the possibility of a traffic accident. Mitigation measures that could be incorporated into the easements would be to require 3 Rivers Communications to provide signage or flagman during the plowing of the cable along the installation route.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to Health and Safety would occur under this alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Action Alternative: No changes to agricultural activities would occur if this alternative is chosen.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to agricultural activities will occur under this alternative.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

Action Alternative: The proposal will not create nor eliminate permanent jobs in the area under this alternative.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment will occur.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Action Alternative: This proposed alternative will not increase tax revenues or result in an increase or decrease of the tax base.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to the local or state tax base or tax revenue will occur.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:
Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

Action Alternative: will not increase demand for government services under this alternative.

No Action Alternative: No increase in demands for government services will occur under this alternative.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:
List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

Action Alternative: No known zoning laws or management plans are in place for any of the proposed locations under this alternative.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to locally government plans will occur under this alternative.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

Action Alternative: The proposed project would not affect recreational access. No impacts to recreational activities are anticipated under this alternative.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to access and quality of recreational and wilderness activities would occur if this alternative is chosen.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

Action Alternative: this alternative will not affect distribution of population or housing in the Lima or surrounding areas of Southwestern Montana.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to population would occur under this alternative.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Action Alternative: this proposed alternative will have no effect on social structures or mores of the surrounding area.

No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Action Alternative: this alternative will not affect cultural uniqueness and diversity of the area. The cable will be underground and will not be visible to the public.

No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Action Alternative: This alternative will provide state of the art telecommunications capacity to the rural Twin Bridges residents in the area, including high speed DSL internet coverage. It will also generate $150 for the Public Land Trust, $715.40 for the Common School Trust, and $6,288.62 for the Western/Eastern Trust. Total amount generated under this alternative would be $6,288.62.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative the Twin Bridges area would not receive an upgrade in telecommunications coverage and no money would be generated for the three state land trusts.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Timothy Egan	**Date:**	May14, 2018
	Title:	Dillon Unit Manager		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action alternative, authorize 3 Rivers communications to install fiber optic cable across nine tracts of State Land in the Dillon Unit.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

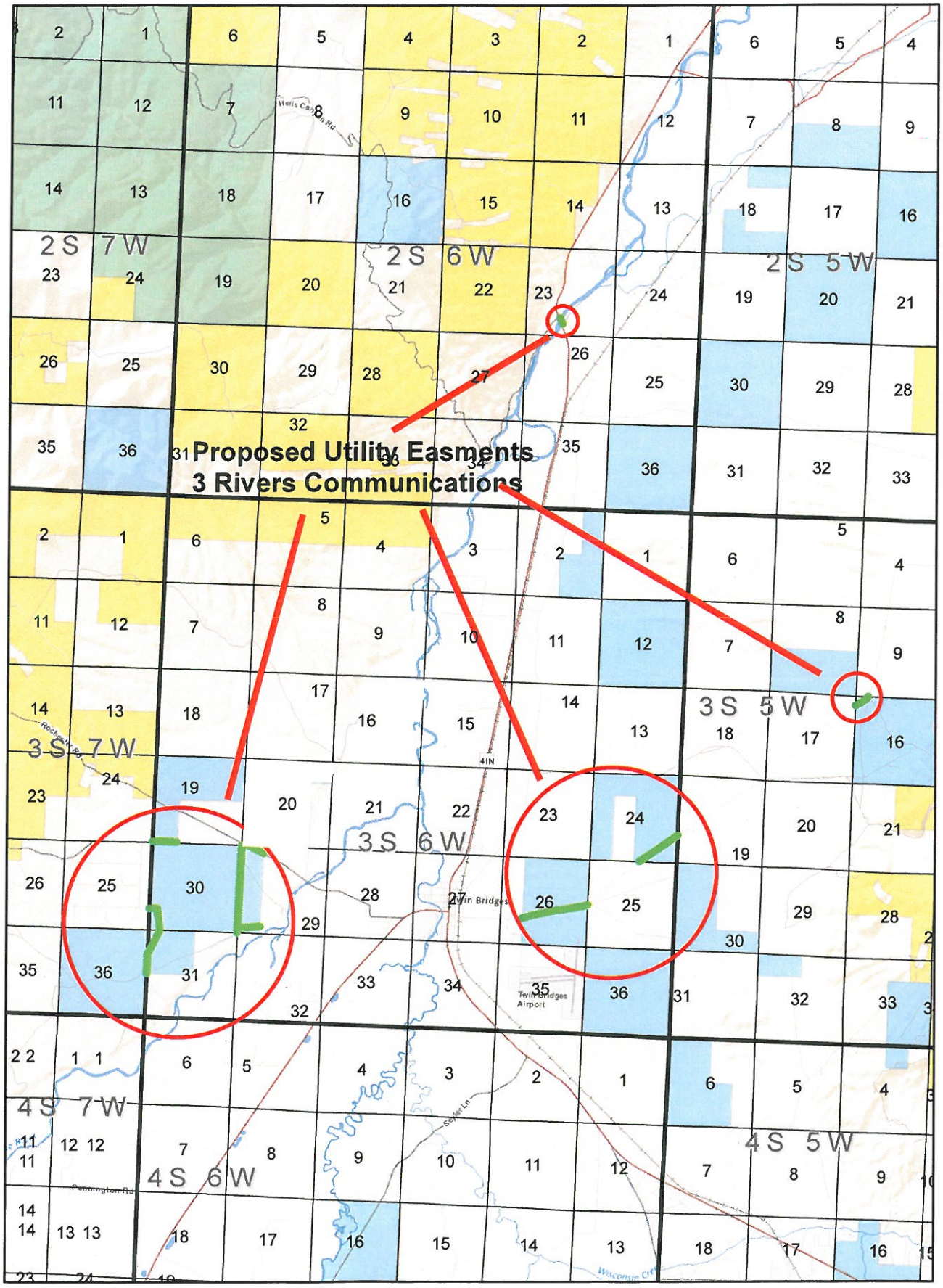
No significant impacts anticipated.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ] EIS	[ ] More Detailed EA	[X] No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Martin Balukas **Title:** CLO Trust Land Program Manager	
Signature:		**Date:** 5/14/18

Proposed Utility Easements - 3 Rivers Communications



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Proposed Utility Easement

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